

The Presbytery Council met May 20 to consider what guidance to offer sessions and pastors as they discern how and when to begin holding in-person, in-door worship. As to the "when," we recognize that every situation is different, as the number of new cases varies county by county. We encourage you to be in contact with your county health department for more information, as well as to visit the [Indiana State Government](#) website. This site provides helpful information about the number of cases, tests, etc., for each county. Please look at neighboring counties as well.

It is the Council's guidance that the earliest possible date for in-door, in-person worship would be June 21. The decision, of course, is up to each individual session; some may choose an earlier or later date.

As sessions consider how to return, it will be important to follow practices such as:

- opening doors and windows whenever possible
- ensuring physical distancing at all times and limiting the number of people in the building
- wearing masks or other face coverings
- refraining from singing
- removing hymnals, worship bulletins, pew pads, pens, etc.
- refraining from shared offering plates and communion wear
- turning off water fountains
- disinfecting doorknobs, bathrooms, and other commonly touched surfaces
- suspending food service

In addition, we hope that you will read "[Returning to Public Worship: Theological and Practical Considerations](#)" on the PC(USA) website. It contains a sample pastoral statement on reentry to public life and worship, constitutional considerations and evaluating risk, a provisional timeline for resuming public worship, general considerations for returning to public worship, specific guidelines organized around the order of worship, and links to additional resources that may be of interest. The provisional timeline begins on page 8, identifies preparation and three stages. We focus here on Preparation and Stage One.

In the **Preparation** period the following activities are listed:

- Maintain regular communication with members
- Set realistic expectations for a gradual return to public worship
- Communication with insurance company regarding building use during the pandemic
- Continuation of alternate plans for worship
- Encouragement of members to adopt daily practices of prayer at home.

Stage One identifies the following activities:

- Evaluate the risks of inviting congregation to in-person gatherings
- If risk is present, restrict church activities to ten or fewer persons
- If applicable, continue online worship
- Prepare for increased risk reduction measures in the church buildings
- Procure or ask members to procure personal protection equipment
- Encourage members to continue practices of daily prayer at home
- Consider small group procedures for ruling elder ordinations, baptisms, funerals, weddings

Each session will need to develop and communicate a plan for reopening. We will send a few examples to you as soon as we receive them.

You may also want to register for and attend the Center for Congregations online workshop, "[When We Gather Again: Post COVID-19 Facility Considerations.](#)"